

November  
1998

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# LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

IHS

PROCESSED

OCT 26, 1998

STOLIBRARY

"Setting the Table"

## BRIEF PRAYERS ON NEWS ITEMS

*Sonia C. Solomonson*

Don't feel helpless when you hear news stories about problems in the world. Pray for those people and concerns. You might clip articles or pictures of those for whom you wish to pray—or even make a prayer book. You might pray for:

- caregivers;
- people suffering from depression;
- those who live in fear.

### YOUTH IN AFRICA BUILD OWN NETWORKS

Lutheran youth in Africa are forming their own youth regional networks. They have identified issues to address concerns such as education and training, HIV/AIDS, abuse of women and children, religious practices in traditional religions, unemployment and career choices, and the marginalization of youth in church decision-making.

*Empower youth everywhere, God of all, and let the church be open to their creative ideas.*

### PASTOR'S ENCOURAGEMENT MOVES SEMINARIAN

Eric Harrison gave up the idea of the ordained ministry after he moved to New York City. He'd felt a call when he was 18 and living in the West Indies. Now thanks to the encouragement of his pastor and to the help of synod staff, Harrison attends the Lutheran Seminary at Philadelphia.

*Nurturing God, help us to encourage one another, knowing the outcome is yours.*

### COURSES HELP DIVORCED PARENTS

Leonard and Deborah Capuzzi assemble professionals to help lead eight-week-long workshops on positive parenting at St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Chester Springs, Pa. The programs help parents develop skills that minimize the effects of divorce and separation.

*Loving God, heal those affected by divorce and lead them to wholeness. **LWT***

*Sonia C. Solomonson is a senior editor for The Lutheran.*

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# Setting the table

Dennis L. Bushkofsky

**Eucharist  
comes  
from a  
Greek  
word  
meaning  
thanks-  
giving.**

## BY ANY OTHER NAME

Travel down a city street that houses a half-dozen church buildings and you will discover by reading their signs that Christians call Holy Communion many different things.

The name *Holy Communion* helps to convey that we partake of God's holiness in this meal. At the same time, Holy Communion shapes us into a community through God and with one another as well.

*Eucharist*, a name also commonly used for the sacrament, comes from a Greek word meaning thanksgiving. The scriptures record that after giving thanks, Jesus broke the bread and gave it to his disciples. The cup of wine was given them in the same manner. We recall these actions of Jesus through what we call the "Great Thanksgiving" in our liturgy.

The *Lord's Supper* recognizes that the meal Christians receive when we come together continues the meal that Jesus had with his disciples on the night before he was betrayed.

The *Sacrament of the Altar* is how Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* describes Holy Communion. Most Christian congregations have an altar or table from which this meal is served. In many traditions, those who commune approach the altar itself in order to receive.

*Mass* is a term used frequently by Roman Catholics; various Protestants have sometimes used this term, too. One of the forms of worship that Martin Luther provided congregations is known as the "German Mass." Essentially the word *mass* refers to the *dismissal* at the end of the liturgy ("Go in peace ...").

The *Divine Liturgy* and the *Divine Service* are other titles that speak of our corporate and holy work as God's people. Although we all probably prefer one title over others for this meal from God, in fact all of these expressions

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speak of the realities of this sacrament.

## HOW OFTEN?

Lutherans, and many other Christians, have in recent years been moving toward celebrating Holy Communion weekly. Such celebration is, in fact, an ancient practice of the Christian church. Many of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus were on Sunday and were associated with his feeding the disciples. Several scholars believe that this pattern existed in the early Christian church. Each Sunday was a day to celebrate the new life of the Lord's resurrection with the meal of the new covenant.

Having the Lord's Supper each Sunday was a tradition maintained through the Reformation. "In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other festivals ..." (Article XXIV of the "Augsburg Confession," in *The Book of Concord*, Fortress Press, 1959). Lutheran congregations have been encouraged to celebrate Holy Communion weekly, though "not every service need be a Eucharist" (*The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*, Application 35B).

Over the past century, many congregations have moved from a quarterly celebration of Holy Communion to monthly, twice monthly, and even weekly celebrations. Word and Sacrament together is the fullest way to celebrate the Lord's presence in our midst. Congregations have established many different ways of working toward this goal. Some with multiple services may offer communion weekly at one service, and less frequently at another service. In other congregations, weekly communion is offered, but at alternating service times. More and more congregations also celebrate Holy Communion each Sunday at all services.

## DISTRIBUTING COMMUNION

Many churches have tried to model the intimacy that Jesus had with his disciples in the upper room. While this might be a possibility for very small congregations, it would be hard for most groups to have such an experience. In fact, there were occasions when Jesus fed multitudes, as in the Feeding of the 5000 recounted in each of the four Gospels.

Whatever the size of our gathering or the way we celebrate Holy Communion, we ought to be

*We ought to be mindful of the unity we have in this meal.*

mindful of the unity we have in this meal, and of the truth that there is room for all people at God's table. Putting in steps to the communion table is usually avoided in contemporary church construction because steps discriminate between those who can and those who cannot climb them. Likewise, having a chalice on the altar for the communion of the ministers while others commune from pre-filled cups does not underscore the unity of the sacrament.

Our posture for receiving communion may vary. Nursing-home residents typically sit in their chairs while ministers of communion take both elements to them. In other settings, communicants may kneel at an altar rail in a continuous table. On a youth retreat at the beach, bread and wine may be passed from one to another standing in a circle. There is no single right way.

Congregations may use leavened or unleavened bread. Wine may be distributed via a common cup, or by a pouring chalice into separate cups, or by intinction (dipping the bread into the wine). While bread and wine are the elements of Holy Communion (*The Use of the Means of Grace*, Principle 44), non-wheat bread, non-alcoholic wine, or grape juice may be offered as alternatives.

In whatever way the sacrament is distributed, it ought to signal the unity all people have at the Lord's table and be appropriate to the size and place of the gathering. Also, the elements themselves ought to show the unity of the Christian community, not our need to satisfy individual, consumer preferences.

Finally, the Lord's Supper does in fact belong to the Lord. It is Christ himself who both hosts the meal and offers himself as food. It is to this gift of the Lord that we all come. **LWT**

*Dennis L. Bushkofsky is an ELCA pastor and an editor of liturgical resources at Augsburg Fortress in Minneapolis.*

## DEEPENING OUR WORSHIP LIFE

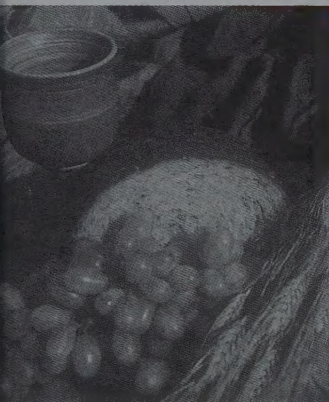
Worship is vitally important to both the church and Women of the ELCA. In Philadelphia during the summer of 1997, the ELCA adopted seven "Initiatives to Prepare for a New Century." The first of these focuses on "deepening our worship life." Part of that initiative says, "we will seek every opportunity to talk with each other about the ways we encounter the living God in worship." Likewise, worship is one of the key "ends statements" of Women of the ELCA and a priority. Given that impetus, LWT will start a column in the Spring of 1999 titled "About worship."

So join the conversation. **What are your questions about worship?** Share them for possible use in "About worship." Mail them to: Lutheran Woman Today, "About Worship," 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60641-4189, postmarked no later than December 31, 1998.



# Our other Thanksgiving table

*Karen Melang*



Eating is absolutely essential to life and one of the most popular human activities. From the huge sit-down dinners many of us eat on holidays, to drive-through, order-in, and carry-out meals, we eat in lots of places and in many ways. We do lunch with friends, make fruit pizzas with kindergartners, or cook three-ingredient meals that can be on the table in only

20 minutes. We expect to eat food (or at least drink coffee) at church functions. Last summer I visited a congregation that didn't even serve coffee, and I wasn't sure I wanted to go back.

All kinds of conversations take place while we're eating. Eating cheesecake to hold back tears, we hold a sister's hand and make difficult decisions about our aging parents. We lay down the law while eating burritos in minivans. We eat prune-whip at a coworker's 40th birthday party. We order lobster to celebrate an anniversary. Sometimes dinners turn into shouting matches where different generations vie for noise volume, among other things.

Week after week, we Lutherans file forward to the supper we call the Lord's. Around this meal, too, there is much dinner conversation. We praise God's lovingkindness and thank God for the goodness of creation. We sing about God's victory feast, the fruitful vineyards, the gathered wheat, and our tables graced with God's presence. We sing hosannas and hear the story of "the night in which our Lord Jesus was betrayed." There is the inexpressible joy of Christ's resurrection and the yearning



for the feast to come.

At this supper we open our hands and our mouths to be fed. We eat the bread and drink the wine, and we are fed in ways beyond our imagining with God's own indestructible life. In this meal, Jesus promises to give us whole-

ness, strength, comfort, and everything else we need. And in a holy and mysterious way, we who eat Christ's body become Christ's body, filled with God's own energy and light—God's own heart and mind in a world desperately in need of love and sense.

This meal is sometimes called the *Eucharist*, from the Greek word that means *thanksgiving*. Before Jesus served this simple meal of bread and wine, he gave thanks for it, as he always did, and as many of us do at meal-times, too. Some of the most ancient words of this dinner conversation are "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God." It is a thanksgiving dinner

indeed. When a meal is such powerful medicine for our souls and such rich food for our spirits, how else could we receive it but with thanksgiving?

This month we eat another Thanksgiving dinner. Our national holiday of Thanksgiving finds most of us gathered with family and friends around tables groaning under the weight of golden turkeys, mounds of mashed potatoes, shimmering cranberry relish, and bubbling casseroles of green beans, onion rings, and mushroom soup. We force ourselves to eat only a sliver of pumpkin pie and an even tinier one of pecan.

It may seem unlikely that this holiday feast could have much in common with the Lord's supper. The basic foods of the Eucharist stand in sharp contrast to the variety and abundance on our other Thanksgiving table. But Thanksgiving dinners and our Eucharistic meals do have some important things in common.

Each is a time to reconnect with family and friends, to remember and revitalize the bonds of love and history that hold us together. Around festive Thanksgiving tables we tell old stories and laugh or cry as we remember the



events that brought and keep us together. We pass babies around, commenting on their specialness and affirming our hope for the future.

At the Eucharist we remember the bonds of God's love and the holy history that has made us God's family. We tell about God's power and love, shown in Israel's rescue from Egypt, the prophets' words of hope, and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus whose words and deeds proclaim God's reign.

Both celebrations are places of hospitality. Around the Thanksgiving table we delight in the company of most people and tolerate the rest. We include the cousin no one is crazy about and play cards with Grandma's new husband, even though he cheats. At least for the day, we welcome everyone.

At the Eucharistic meal, too, all of God's far-flung family is welcome. And the holy meal is not just for us. However different or odd other family members may seem, whatever their race or culture, we know they cannot be strangers to us since they are also God's children. We join our hearts and hands around the Eucharistic table across every boundary, including time and space.

At both of these meals, and in fact at every meal, the true host is God, the creator and generous giver of all that is. From the green-bean casserole to the bread of the Eucharist, blessed and broken and bearing God's own self, all food comes from God's hand. God even presides over fast-food meals eaten hurriedly on the way to soccer games. Behind every bit of daily bread stands God, our wise provider, hands wide open, satisfying the desire of every living thing.

"Come, Lord Jesus," we pray, "be our guest," and so he is, but he is a guest who always brings the dinner, genuine nourishment for body, mind, and spirit. Perhaps it would be more fitting to ask Jesus to "be our host" and to recognize ourselves as guests, hands cupped and open, ready to receive all the good things God intends to give.

*Come, Lord Jesus, be  
our host,  
Give us what we need  
the most;  
Your own life for which  
we long,  
Food to make our bodies  
strong,  
Hearts to share what  
you have given,  
Fit us for your feast in  
heaven. Amen. LWT*

*Karen Melang managed to avoid roasting a turkey for the first 18 years of her marriage. When she finally had to do it, she was shocked by how easy it was! She eats Thanksgiving dinner in Lincoln, Neb., with husband Jim and her young adult children, Anne and Marty.*

# All Saints' Day reflection

*Paul R. Nelson*



It is a tiny town on the edge of the Great Plains. And at its center stands a Lutheran church. Generations have met Christ there, and still do today. My grandmother first took me to church there in the early '50s, when I was very young. It was the holiest place I had ever visited.

Inside, the stained-glass windows blazed with color but gave very little light. The two most intense windows were on either side of the altar. The altar was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. It was dazzling white, with points and pinnacles that rose nearly to the ceiling of the little chancel. It almost glowed. It stood on the plum-colored

carpet gleaming with bits of gilding on its points and moldings.

At the very center was a pointed opening where a purple velvet curtain stood. Before the curtain was a statue of Jesus Christ with his hands outstretched to me and to everyone else in the world.

The table below this beautiful savior was hung with a brocade edged in gold fringe. On it were stitched in letters of gold the words "Holy, Holy, Holy." Over the top of the table and hanging nearly to the floor was a white linen cloth with not a wrinkle in it. On a small shelf above the tabletop there were brass candlesticks with sweet-smelling white candles waiting to add their light to the altar.

My grandmother was among the women who stood guard against the wrinkles in the linen and dust that might dull the altar's gold. She cared deeply for this place. She and the other women who loved and cared for these things helped me to care for them, too. This was the most beautiful place in the whole little world that was this tiny town. This was a holy place. It was a place for a holy people.

Years later I would think that the psalmist who wrote of the "beauty of holiness" must have known a place like this and a person who introduced it to him or her.

One Sunday morning as a young child, I watched the grown-ups go to Holy Communion—stepping over me as they went from the pew. I was filled with wonder. I wondered about the little white railing that stood before the altar, the railing that the



statue of Jesus seemed to be reaching across. The grown-ups knelt there. It was half of a circle, not like altar rails I would see in other churches that had a gate in them. This rail was a half-circle unbroken by any opening except at either end, where the pastor could enter to stand before the altar. When Grandma returned from Holy Communion, she took her place in the pew and bowed her head and closed her eyes. When her eyes opened, I asked, "What happened to the other half of the railing?" She thought for a moment and said, "I know you can't see it. It goes around behind the altar. All those we love, and who love Jesus with us, are kneeling at the other railing half that we can't see. It makes a complete and unbroken circle around Jesus." She didn't have to tell me that it included Grandpa and other townspeople I had never known but whose names were chiseled on the stones outside in the cemetery.

I still think of all the saints gathered at the table of the Lord whenever this holy meal is celebrated and Christ stretches out his arms to us. I have met some of these saints in history that I long to know better. I have lost some to death that I long to meet again. I am glad that now the young saints are no longer left in the pew to wonder, but are welcome to taste and see the goodness of the Lord. I hope there are still places of holiness for holy people ... and also for people like me. **LWT**

*Paul R. Nelson is director for worship in the ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries.*



## And then the answer came

As I knelt at the altar  
I wondered why  
There was always  
A little red wine  
Left in my communion cup.  
And then the answer came  
"God's love,  
Like communion wine,  
Is for everyone and  
Still there is love  
Left over from  
Everlasting to everlasting."

As I knelt at the  
Communion rail  
I wondered  
"Why is the rail a half-circle?  
And where is the other half?"  
And then the answer came  
"In heaven."

*Estella Bryhn  
West Salem, Wis.*





# Graceful practice

Karen G. Bockelman

One day, when my daughter was about 3-years-old, she suggested we play a game of “beauty parlor.” This time, she would cut *my* hair. I sat on the floor in front of her. She gently pulled strands of my hair with one hand and, using the first two fingers of her other hand, pretended to cut my hair just as I would cut hers. So far, so good. Then she spoke. “Sit still,” she commanded. “Don’t move. Don’t move your head, Mommy. Sit still. I told you to sit still!”

Anyone who has spent time with children—parent, teacher, pastor, friend, grandparent, neighbor—has probably had a similar experience. A child’s play can reveal more about us than we are prepared to hear. Such moments can be powerful, even devastating, in their insight.

Have you ever watched children play “church?” Do they baptize their dolls or pets? Do they hand out small pieces of food or drink? Do they sing, preach, read the Bible, or take up an offering? Some children, in their play, are lavish with gestures of welcome and peace, of acceptance and sharing. Other times the play can be disconcertingly frank about church as a place and time for sitting still and being quiet.

Worship is at the heart of what we do in our congregations. It is important to ask how clear our worship is in making Christ known at its heart and center. In 1997 the ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*. I was privileged to serve on the task force that prepared this statement. In our work, the members of the task force kept coming back to the calling of the



church “to exercise care and fidelity in its use of the means of grace, so that all people may hear and believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ and be gathered into God’s own mission for the life of the world” (*The Use of the Means of Grace*, Principle 2).

The means of grace—God’s Word and the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion—are God’s gifts to us. The statement, adopted for guidance and practice, was not designed to impose uniformity but to encourage unity and to foster common understanding and practice amid the rich diversity of our congregations. The statement is not intended to be a rule book. It is designed to lift up biblical and confessional principles regarding the use of the means of grace and, through background information and application suggestions, to encourage ELCA members and congregations to deepen their own understanding and enrich their sacramental life and practice.

Throughout the process of study, writing, and adoption, some sections of *The Use of the Means of Grace* have generated more discussion than others. These included the continued encouragement of the weekly celebration of Holy

Communion, the role of confession and absolution, the suggestion of congregational sponsors for baptismal candidates, the repeated affirmation of Baptism, the role of lay assisting ministers, and the availability of alternative elements for Holy Communion.

Perhaps the most discussed issue has been the age of first communion. In a change from the previous position of the ELCA (*A Statement on Communion Practices*, 1989), the new statement does not preclude the communion of infants. *The Use of the Means of Grace* states that “admission to the Sacrament is by invitation of the Lord, presented through the Church to those who are baptized” (Principle 37).

The statement goes on to say that “infants and children may be communed for the first time during the service in which they are baptized” (Application 37D), although the time when baptized children begin to commune on a regular basis is “determined through mutual conversation that includes the pastor, the child, and the parents or sponsors involved, within the accepted practices of the congregation” (Application 37C).

***The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*** (Augsburg Fortress). This is the text of the statement adopted by the fifth Biennial Assembly of the ELCA and includes a study guide. It is also available in Spanish translation. (\$4.95. Order code: LT0-8066-3648-3; Spanish: LT0-8066-3702-1.)

The following resources have been developed in response to the adoption of *The Use of the Means of Grace* and are newly available from Augsburg Fortress:

***It Makes a Difference: Use of the Means of Grace.*** This new video supports *The Use of the Means of Grace* with examples of sacramental practice in a number of ELCA congregations. (\$19.95. LT6-0000-9044-7.)

***Exploring the Sacraments with Young Children: Leader Sourcebook.*** Designed to help pastors and parish educators develop programs for sacramental education for young children and their families. (\$9.99. LT0-8066-3645-9.)

***My Place at God's Table Child's Book.*** (For 3- to 5-year-olds. \$5.99. LT0-8066-3643-2.)

***My Place at God's Table Family Book.*** (\$3.99. LT0-8066-3644-0.)

***The Welcome Table Child's Book.*** (For 6- to 10-year-olds. \$6.99. LT0-8066-1057-3.)

***The Welcome Table Family Book.*** (Leader Guide: \$6.99. LT0-8066-1058-1; Family Book: \$3.49. LT0-8066-3642-4.)

***Welcome Water.*** (A prebaptism booklet for parents and sponsors. \$3.49. LT0-8066-3699-8.)

***A Splash of Welcome Water.*** (For 3- to 6-year-olds. \$5.99. LT0-8066-3648-6.)

To order, call 800-328-4648.

(Continued from page 11)

While these and other specific issues of practice are certainly important, I would suggest that the most powerful impact of *The Use of the Means of Grace* will come as groups of individuals in congregations come together to think through the statement's implications for enriching their sacramental life. The great joy of our life as a task force was the passionate and challenging conversation around the issues. Providing the opportunity for such conversations to multiply throughout the ELCA may prove to be our greatest contribution.

I particularly cherish the opportunity for deeper biblical and confessional reflection. The section on the means of grace and Christian mission is only a beginning and begs for action in daily and congregational life. I have renewed my own commitment to the need for lifelong, age-appropriate instruction for parents, baptismal sponsors, children, and adults—instruction that emphasizes the gifts God gives us in Word and Sacrament. It is God who acts in the means of grace, but it is in our practices that God's presence can be made clear to all. **LWT**



**Karen G. Bockelman** is an assistant to the bishop in the Northeastern Minnesota Synod. She lives in Duluth, Minn., with her husband and daughter (who is now 10 and no longer gets her hair cut by Mom).



# Pass the Thanksgiving

Marj Leegard

Are you an “over the river and through the woods” grandmother, with a 40-pound turkey roasting in the oven and three different kinds of freshly baked pie cooling on the pantry shelves? Few of us are. Because we are not *that* grandmother, Thanksgiving gatherings are not quite what we think they once were.

Memories. Wonderful roasted crackling-brown turkey skin. Crisp, tart pickles and mashed potatoes with puddles of butter in the center. People laughing and hugging, and aunts who insist on kissing all the kids—even the boys. Memories have a way of bundling together every good thing about many Thanksgivings, many holidays. So perhaps it's no surprise that when we live the reality of this year's celebrations, with our microscopes trained on every detail, nothing seems as perfect as it was then.

When we are children the family is what it is: family. When we grow older we see the family as fragments, as memories. There are empty chairs. It is difficult to realize that there have always been empty chairs. The family that seemed so complete when we were kids was fragmented to our grandparents.

So, how can I celebrate the perfect family gathering? There are many ways! First, I return to the frame of

mind I had when I was a child. This is the day. These are the people. One friend, two relatives, or three neighbors. It doesn't matter.

Second, share stories. I can fill those empty chairs with wonderful memories. I can share the stories of Uncle Wilbur who gave babies sticks of gum (that were quickly removed by their more circumspect mothers) and who shared his ice cream with his dog.

Third, I accept what the day brings with joy. So I don't have a huge turkey—just think, I won't have to deal with scrubbing the roaster! If I have one kind of pie, I'll smile and say, “I believe I'll have apple.”

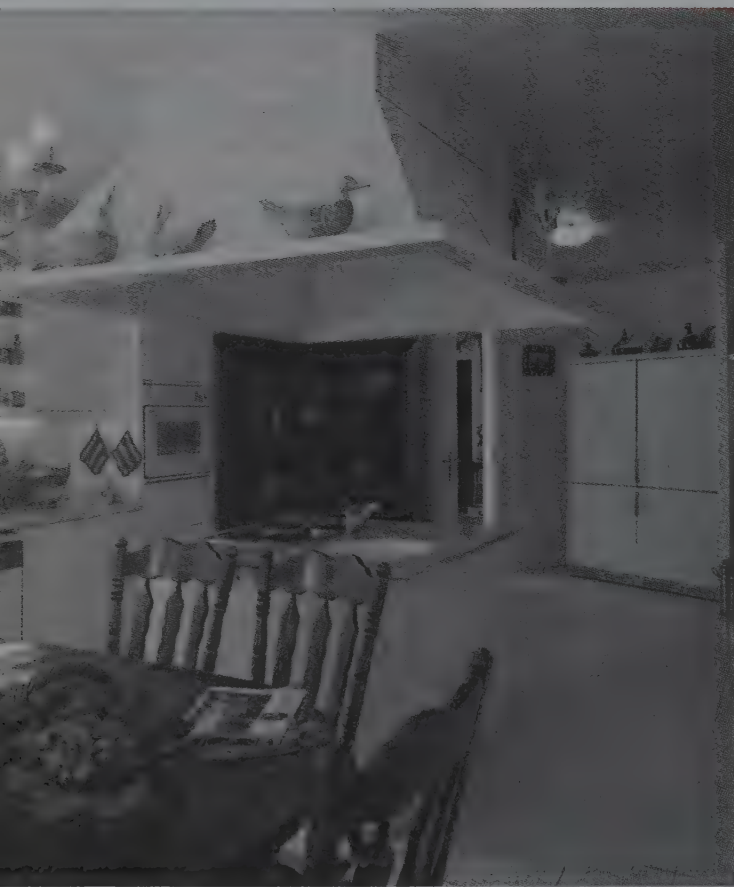
Finally, I offer thanks to God for God's many blessings. If we can't be the grandmothers who live “over the river and through the woods,” we can be the historians who say: “God was.” “God did.” “God always.” “Jesus said ...” The past holds the present steady and makes the future possible. Pass the blessing along this Thanksgiving. **LWT**

*LWT columnist Marj Leegard is a member of Bakke-Lund-Richwood parish in Detroit Lakes, Minn.*



# Seated at the table

*Kathie Bender Schwich*



Our family recently moved into a new home where we were faced with the problem of an old kitchen table that wouldn't fit the new kitchen space. So the next item we added to our "to do" list was finding a table to accommodate our needs.

This wasn't a new problem for us. Being what is now popularly termed a "blended family," our family table has taken on many different configurations. There's

the space we use on weekends, when my husband and I eat together with our young son. There's the space we use during the week, when the three of us are joined by my two stepsons. And there's the space we occupy on the children's birthdays, when we're joined by my stepsons' grandparents, their mother and stepfather, and their two stepbrothers!



As crazy as this all seems to me at times, I know full well that I'm not alone in this situation. Many women and men find themselves sharing the parenting responsibilities of children who live with them on a part-time basis, and who are part of two families. Having the support and understanding of people who have "been there, done that" certainly helps. I am grateful for the friends with whom I can discuss the daily events and surprises that being part of this kind of family brings. And each situation presents its own opportunities for learning.

I learned early on that my stepsons have a mother, and that I'm not her. Although I am half of their parental unit in our home, I continue to respect my stepsons' birth mother and the importance of her presence in their lives. I've learned that it's an added blessing if the children's two birth parents have a relationship based on mutual respect, in spite of the end of their marriage. This provides the children with a greater sense of security in their world, as it goes through some major transitions. Even if that isn't the case, it's unwise to try to take over the authority of the birth parent, or to say or do anything that would lower the children's opinion of their other parent. The children may wonder, "If you're badmouthing my parent, am I next?" It's wise to follow an old adage and speak kindly or not at all.

I've also learned to take my lead from the children on certain issues. When a close family friend died, my husband, who is a pastor, was asked to officiate at the funeral. I told the two boys that they could sit with

their mother or with me. Their response was a very innocent, "Why can't we all sit together?" We did! And I believe our relationships were strengthened as a result.

Because my husband and I have a child of our own as well, we are intentional about treating all three of the children as equal members of the family. Before the birth of my son, my two stepsons were excited at the news of my pregnancy, and they were thrilled at the birth of their new brother. The qualifiers of "step" or "half" are seldom part of their vocabulary.

It's important to include the children at some point in the family's decision-making process. Children of divorce—no matter how friendly the divorce—have experienced episodes of hushed conversations, frightening silences, and closed-door decisions. Then, in the midst of these, they were told that Mom and Dad were splitting up. Private conversations between spouses should be reserved for times that are truly private. Young ears can easily be frightened by discussions that appear secretive.

Step-parenting requires broad shoulders, a compassionate heart, and a sense of humor. I found I needed to develop broad shoulders to avoid taking every apparent slight personally. The first year that one of my stepsons came home from school with his hand-made Mother's Day gift, handed it to me and with pride, and asked, "Won't Mom love it?" I had to swallow hard, force a smile, and say, "Yes, I know she will!" I had to remind myself once again of my relationship to him and the boundaries it contains.

The compassionate heart is helpful during those times of childhood misbehavior and acting out, when I'm tempted to scream at the guilty parties. At those times I need to remind myself that these seemingly uncontrollable pre-adolescents were once sweet infants and huggable toddlers who adored their parents. They, too, were once young children who gazed lovingly into the eyes of a mother and father who couldn't help but return the affection. It is neither my fault, nor theirs, that we were joined together at a time when their age, hormones, and circumstances cause them to do otherwise. My love for their father is what brought us together; my growing love for each of them will keep us together.

My family and I couldn't do any of this without a sense of humor. Humor helps us maintain our sanity and keep things in perspective. When my husband and I were married, his children and I decided that the boys would call me "Muti." This derivative of the German "Mater" (Mother) gave them the ability to refer to me in a parental way while reserving the title of "Mother" for their birth mother. When my own son began to talk, the family shared many humorous moments when he would overhear one of his brothers call me "Muti" and respond, "NO, Mommy!"

In all of this, my spouse is a key player. He helps by empowering me with authority and permission to set family rules and guidelines. Children are experts at the "if Mom says no, ask Dad" game. They can have a field day when stepparents

are also in the picture, giving them as many as four parents to play against. It's important that, as much as possible, all parents are clear about the rules and united in their enforcement of them.

Our family table can be very chaotic at times. But encircling and enfolding it is our thankfulness to God for the wonderful blessings in our lives. For me there is nothing more sacred than being in a place where I can appreciate the world in new ways through the eyes of a child. Because of the family relationships in which I find myself, I have been given this opportunity not once, but three times! When I ponder that, the question, "What did I do to deserve this?" goes from one of despair to one of awe and humility.

Regardless of the number of chairs around our table, we are always intentional about making room for one more very significant family member: the one whose love and grace brought us all together in the first place, who now binds us together in our joys and struggles, and whose presence we invite as together we say, "Come Lord Jesus, be our guest." **LWT**



*Kathie Bender Schwich is an ELCA pastor and executive for leadership in the Division for Outreach of the ELCA. She is married to Pastor Dan Schwich, and lives in Chicago with her two stepsons, Peter (age 12) and Andy (age 9), and her son, Jerome (age 3).*



# Among the great cloud of witnesses



*LWT Readers tell the stories of saints in their lives who are now part of the church triumphant.*

## PEDER

I thank God for the cloud of witnesses in the “eternal bleachers cheering us on.” My mind goes back many years ago, as I remember one of these saints.

Peder was a shoe repairman in our small town. He transformed old shoes until they looked almost new. His work was done faithfully and well, and he took time to listen and talk with people. He was a friend to the younger folks who came to visit and watch him work. Peder was a Christian, and we all knew it. He had a kind face and a special gentleness as one “who had been with Jesus.”

Coming to America from Norway, Peder found fellowship in worship with other believers. To hear him pray, even in Norwegian, was to feel God’s presence. We were blessed by his quiet, loving witness. Peder was someone who cared.

Never great or well-known in this life, this humble man of God will be remembered as one of the saints in my early life.

“What does the Lord require of us, but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God?” (Micah 6:8).

*Borghild Gisselquist  
Edina, Minn.*



## EDNA

I knew Edna Doering less than a year-and-a-half, but she left a lasting impression on me. When I joined Bethany Church in 1990, this remarkable woman had recently completed a year as council

president at the age of 92. She had been one of the 250 out of 1500 people who survived the General Slocum ferry fire in 1904, still considered the worst maritime disaster in New Jersey history. Edna felt that she had been spared in order to fulfill God's plan that she spread the good news of Christ. She never married and she devoted her talent and energy to her family, to teaching, and to Bethany. She was devoted to the small Women of the ELCA group there and encouraged me to become its next president. Her progressive ideas and enthusiasm opened my mind and stimulated my creativity so that I could help grow her beloved church.

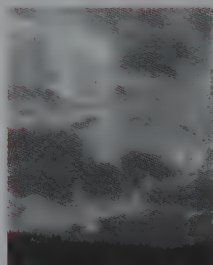
Edna had a truly beautiful, warm-eyed, kindly face; we felt a special kinship and affection for each other from the beginning. She had a wonderful sense of humor, a generous nature, and an intellectual curiosity. She even admitted to finding my purple-sequined earrings "fascinating."

Knowing her made me stronger. Her zest for life and her humility drew people to her. She witnessed for Jesus with every action, every word. When she died, I was honored to be asked to write the copy for a special plaque that is affixed to

"her" pew. She is still Bethany's most admired member.

Edna was filled with grace and lovingkindness—gifts of the Holy Spirit. She made a difference to many of us, and we thank God we had her as a role model. I still miss that lady dearly and often ask the Lord to give her a kiss for me.

*Della Smith  
Kearny, N.J.*



## AUNT IDA

Aunt Ida came to live with us when I was 10. We watched from the bay window as she shuffled slowly

from her taxi to our front porch, observing every detail, from her gray deaconess uniform to her close-cropped hair. She'd visited before. This time she was coming to stay. As Mother's unmarried sister with few obligations, she was the logical one to care for us while Mother went to a tuberculosis sanitarium for treatment.

My confusion, anger, and despair at "losing" Mother numbed me. What would life be like without her? From my first glimpse of Aunt Ida in her new identity as our caregiver, I was embarrassed, apprehensive, and resistant. As a homemaker Aunt Ida fell short of the ideal. She believed that dust under beds was harmful to you only if you disturbed it. Our meals often started with dessert and ended with meat.



Ida's priorities were different. She made time to listen to our problems. She was a *pray-er*. Her petitions reached far beyond our family. She often returned from mid-winter walks without gloves or a hat because she met someone who needed them.

She lived her final years in a Lutheran home for the aged. The day of her death, I sat with her. A stroke had left her mute. She looked longingly at her Bible on the bedside table. The book's cracked spine had been taped and re-taped. As I held it, the book automatically fell open to her favorite passages. I began to read aloud. Her eyes shone as I read Simeon's words, "Lord now let your servant depart in peace."

As a child I had been chagrined by Aunt Ida's different ways. As an adult I recognize the great gift of freedom she possessed in being fully herself. Her example freed me to be "unconventional" in trying to fulfill God's purpose in my life.

*Ellen Fackler Gamrath  
Mercer Island, Wash.*

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### AUNT IVY

Aunt Ivy was one of those unusual, busy people who seemed always to have been *just waiting for your call*. At the drop of a hat, she could be off in

her big, old Plymouth, loading up buoyant kids, their harassed mothers, and supplies for a trek 15 miles out east to the family ranch.

Having been an English teacher and a public librarian, she had a love affair with words, often finding a teachable moment for all the children. And they would listen! Children who never heard their mothers call them to dinner would politely hear Aunt Ivy. On the way home from the ranch, we would stop at Panorama Point—"Now, children, do you remember that panorama means *pan*—in many directions—and *rama*—a view." Before us would be seven mountain peaks stretching from north to south, and the *real reason* for stopping—giant eastern Oregon clouds, the love of her life. Many times we watched clouds together.

Not only was she the matriarch of the family, beloved by children and adults alike, but she also became a matriarch of the church family. She resided in a street-level apartment directly across the parking lot from church. There were numerous trips across the parking lot to enlist, borrow, beg, or ask something of Ivy. She wrote a church history, organized a church library, served on many a committee, kept a spare key, and was always there. Even today, those who have been at that church for many years often catch themselves looking across the parking lot—remembering. And she is still always there, at communion, at rummage sales, and most especially when the big thunderclouds begin piling up. She is my Aunt Ivy Cloud-Walker.

*Elsa Ruth Douglass  
Sutherlin, Ore.*

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# The communion of saints

Linda Post Bushkofsky



Gail Ramshaw, writing in *Words Around the Table* (Liturgy Training Publications, 1991), reminds us that “to be a Christian is never to be alone. ‘Christian’ is not my given name, but our family name, our adoption surrounding us with so great a cloud of witnesses.... The communion of saints is an image of God’s very self.”

I’ve seen that image of God when I’ve been an assisting minister. What a privilege it has been to see the people of God, young and old alike, come to receive the body and blood of Christ. I have seen the joy of a 4-year-old as she received and held Jesus in her hands.

I have seen an aging parent bring the pain of an adult child’s death due to AIDS to the altar and be strengthened through the bread and wine. I have seen the slow and careful steps of an elderly child of God as she came forward for the Eucharist. In this communion of saints, I have seen God.

The first two book reviews this month bring us to some of those in the communion of saints who are often ignored, or pushed aside. The third review offers ways in which we can build up the body of Christ.



***Train Go Sorry: Inside a Deaf World***, by Leah Hager Cohen.  
Vintage Books, 1995.

*Reviewed by Carole Silvoy,  
Catasauqua, Pa.*

*Train Go Sorry* is a fascinating glimpse into the world of the Deaf in America. Deaf people—with a capital D—are those with a hearing deficit whose linguistic, social, and political connections to other Deaf people help them define who they are.



As the granddaughter of Deaf adults and the daughter of an administrator of the Lexington School for the Deaf in New York City, Leah Hager Cohen grew up hearing in the midst of a Deaf community. There she gained insights and experience that she shares masterfully in this book.

The author takes the lives of several Deaf people—recent Lexington students, her Deaf grandfather, her sign-language tutor—and uses them to illustrate the culture of the Deaf in America. The language of signs is described as both a freedom in communicating without sounds and as a barrier between deaf and hearing people. Families who don't sign are cut off from much of the lives of their Deaf children.

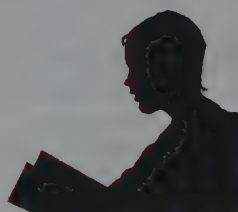
Cohen points out the intense struggle for people to learn English without ever hearing it spoken, and the constant pressure from society to speak, read, and transact life in this language that will always remain foreign. She also manages to express the unique fluidity and complex nuances of American Sign Language as used by signers. Her writing style is comfortable and familiar, making the reader eager to hear more about the real-life characters she brings to us on the page.

## FOR REFLECTION

1. What elements of a hearing service of worship (for example, lighting and music) would be inappropriate for a Deaf congregation? How might parts of a Deaf service—an extended time for sharing the peace, or beating a drum for rhythm, for example—

challenge a hearing congregation?

2. What might a partnering of a hearing congregation and a mission congregation of the Deaf look like? What advantages and drawbacks could you foresee?



***Circle of Years: A Caregiver's Journal***,  
by Houston  
Hodges.  
Morehouse  
Publishing,  
1998.

*Reviewed by Mary Ann Brussat,  
New York, N.Y.*

(This review first appeared in  
*Values and Visions Review Service*.  
Used here with permission.)

In 1992 Houston Hodges, a retired Presbyterian minister, realized that his widowed mother, Betty, was exhibiting clear signs of dementia and could no longer live on her own. He would have to help her pack up her house in Texas and move to a retirement village near his home in Huntsville, Ala. Hodges began to chronicle the story of these changes as diary notes sent to a meeting on the interdenominational computer network, Ecunet. Learn about Ecunet at [www.ecunet.org](http://www.ecunet.org).

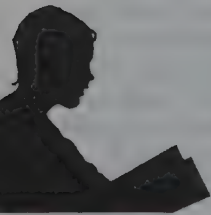
*Circle of Years* is a collection of those notes, which continue through June 1997, by which time Betty had several serious illnesses along a general path of decline. Hodges agonizes over all the details involved in becoming a parent to a parent, and

he confesses his many ambiguous feelings throughout the experience. But he is always there for Betty, and she remains cheerful, doing the best she can to keep track of what is happening around her.

Hodges is a good mentor for the "sandwich generation." He makes no bones about the frustrations of caring for Betty. He openly acknowledges that he, like the rest of us, can be unsettled by the twin burdens of guilt and obligation. But because he is so honest about the challenges, we really believe him when he talks about the many blessings of quality time with his "zany old mother." This is a book about respect and compassion, with love and hope overflowing.

#### FOR REFLECTION

1. What are some blessings and burdens inherent in parenting a parent?
2. How does an adult child show respect and compassion for an aging parent when feelings of guilt and obligation overwhelm?



***Silver Boxes:  
The Gift of  
Encouragement,***  
by Florence  
Littauer. Word  
Books, 1994.

*Reviewed by  
Lu Krueger, Kearney, Neb.*

The basis of this inspiring book is Ephesians 4:29: "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as

there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear."

All kinds of boxes are explored in every chapter. In "Gift Boxes" we learn that compliments can be something as simple as a "thank you." In "Flower Boxes" we come to understand that because of our differences in personalities, self-worth, backgrounds, and circumstances, some of us see flowers where others see weeds. In "Mailboxes" we are reminded of the importance of writing thoughtful and encouraging notes to others. You'll have to read the book to find out what it means to receive silver boxes or what is found in a box of peace.

Often used for inspirational programs, *Silver Boxes* tells us how to recognize and relate to needs of others and how to offer others the gift of encouragement.

1. Think of someone who has encouraged you, or discouraged you, even to the point at which your lifestyle or career was affected.
2. What factors influence whether our outlook on life is positive or negative? **LWT**

"Bookmarks" columnist Linda Post Bushkofsky and her husband, Dennis, are members of St. Stephen Lutheran in Bloomington, Minn.

To submit your own book review contact Linda by email at [linda.post.bushkofsky@ecunet.org](mailto:linda.post.bushkofsky@ecunet.org) or write to her in care of LWT, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189.



# One cup, one plate

Kami Kinard



No one sets a prettier table than Izetta Lingle, my husband's grandmother. Her daughter, my moth-

er-in-law, once had to build reinforcements for Izetta's kitchen cabinets to safely hold her many dishes.

I fit right into this family. The last time we moved, we counted eight sets of china.

What is it that attracts women like us to china? Perhaps we feel that when we prepare a beautiful table, we are making the statement, "Look how well I provide for my family."

A few months ago my husband and I were washing dishes after having some friends over for dinner. We agreed that we should share time with others in this way more often. I said I would have company for dinner more often if I didn't have to wash dishes afterward.

Then I began imagining a utopian society in which each person owns only one cup and one plate. Each person would bring his or her own

dinnerware to every meal, no matter where that meal was served. You could have a dinner party for 50 people and only have to wash one place setting, your own.

Later I realized that in one sense God has already made real this vision. Every Sunday the host of hosts sets a perfect table with a single cup and plate. With one cup, we receive the blood of Christ that sets us free. With one plate, we are presented the bread of life, Christ's broken body.

Better than my imagined dinner party for 50, the Eucharist meal, like the loaves and fishes Jesus multiplied to feed the 5000, is offered to everyone. All are invited to this banquet! This gracious meal knits us together with Christians of all backgrounds. Everyone who has ever communed and everyone who ever will commune joins us at the table. In a vast community united by one meal, we experience the reality we all will share in God's kingdom. The Eucharist is but an appetizer, a "foretaste of the feast to come."

One cup and one plate. With only two dishes, God renews again and again the promise of salvation for all. Each time we commune, God serves us the feast of feasts upon a simply set table that makes the statement, "Look how well I provide for my family." **WV**

*Kami Kinard is a full-time mom and a part-time freelance writer. She is a member of Shepherd of the Sea Lutheran in Atlantic Beach, N.C.*



# Welcome to the banquet

Lily R. Wu

**Read: Luke 14:1-24; 22:7-30**

When I was young and people asked me what my father did for a living, I'd say, "He goes to parties and asks everybody, 'Is everything all right?'" For 40 years, Dad was a restaurateur in New York City's Chinatown, where he often managed banquets for hundreds of people.

Guests feasted on an abundance of festive food, usually 12 to 16 courses. However, just as important was how the guests warmly welcomed each other, making the celebration what it was meant to be. These passages in Luke suggest to me that at God's banquet of life we Christians are the guests who are meant to warmly welcome others in honor of our host and the occasion.

And who are these others? While the world may label some people inferior or unworthy, no one need prove themselves at God's banquet. Thankfully, God invites us all as honored guests, even treating us like daughters and sons!

Gathering friends to revel at "our own table" might be what we hoped for ... but, it seems that God has seated people of faith all around the banquet hall. I guess we're meant to "meet and greet," and practice hospitality! And isn't it the hallmark of faith to seek to love others as God first loved us?

I'm reminded of a story told by the Rev. Bernice King, daughter of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In this story, an angel reveals two banquet scenes. The people at the first banquet were solemn and weak-looking, while those at the second were joyful and robust. Guests at both dinners had to use 10-foot-long spoons for eating. The people in the first group, though trying to feed themselves, were starving. But the people in the second group were reaching across the tables to feed each other.

*Lord God, thank you for inviting us to your banquet table. Teach us how to honor you not only with acts of kindness and justice, but also in our witness together as your church. Amen.*

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

At your next family or church banquet, share stories of times and places where you felt especially welcomed, and why. Give thanks for the people who made that happen! **LWT**

*Lily R. Wu works in hospitality ministry with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service in New York City, and with Lutheran Human Relations Association in Milwaukee.*



# IdeaNet

November 1998 • Vol. 2, Number 3

For Mission Together

## Thankofferings: “Making a Difference”

Thankofferings. What comes to mind? The little plastic boxes with the cross on top? The cardboard boxes shaped like churches tucked on the kitchen window sill? The cans with the special wrappers?

Does the discipline of giving Thankofferings or the motivation and thankfulness of the women who gave them in years past come clearly to our memory? Do Thankofferings today live up to the example of our foremothers, their strong sense of mission, and their knowledge of how to “get the job done”?

Are we secretly wondering year after year whether a Thank-offering is an event, a worship service, a devotion, a special Sunday for the women of the church, or an activity? Thank-offering is all of those things and much more.

Thankofferings are personal. Each woman disciplines herself to give thanks for God’s activity in her life and to give offerings so that she can be a partner in furthering God’s vision and mission. And Thankofferings are also communal. In them the community bears public witness to God’s handiwork and blessings

and has opportunity to make its offerings a blessing to others.

To give Thankofferings is to give praise. It is to connect our thanksgiving and praise, to be reminded of who we are and whose we are.

Thankofferings are part of a long tradition of women living out God’s call to *go and tell*, of women responding with tangible acts—feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, clothing the naked, and visiting those in prison. Our foremothers built churches and sponsored missionaries. Today women are visiting prisons, supporting the training of pastors, and advocating for women and children in crisis.

Congregations recently received the *Women of the ELCA 1999 Stewardship Resources* book, which contains new helps not only for planning Thankoffering services but also for deepening our devotional and prayer life so that we can give our offerings in a truly thankful spirit. The theme for the 1999–2002 triennium, “Live God’s Justice,” will help us to center our thanks and offerings “for mission together” to make a difference.

*Valora Starr Butler,  
Director for Stewardship  
and Evangelism*

# Postcard Ideas

## **Pie, prayer, and promises**

For our Thankoffering program, we started with a dessert party, offering several kinds of pies. Before collecting the Thankoffering, one member gave a short presentation that highlighted things our offerings have done in the past and concluded with a stewardship Bible study. Next each woman was asked to write on a commitment card one thing she would like to commit to doing and giving for the next Thankoffering. The cards were used during prayer time. Several weeks later each person received her own card in the mail as a reminder of her commitment.

*Sandra*

*Minneapolis, Minn.*

## **Seeing Katie's Fund grow**

We put a tall glass flower vase on the table at our monthly meetings. The vase is tied with a big bright bow and has a tag with "Katie's Fund" on it. We throw in our nickels, dimes, quarters, and dollar bills, and through the glass we can watch the fund grow until year's end when it's sent to the churchwide office of Women of the ELCA. This vase also shows up at board meetings and other special events. This idea could also be used for collecting Thankofferings.

*Billie Hilt*

*Peace Lutheran*

*St. Francis, Kan.*

## **A "give thanks" corner**

Many times we do not give thanks for those who do the behind-the-scenes tasks—we either take their contributions for granted, or we are simply not aware of how some jobs get done. We started a "Give Thanks" bulletin board. We encourage people to use it to lift up women and girls who without much fanfare serve the organization, congregation, and community in very important ways: for example, those who do hospital visits or keep the food pantry organized. Hearing what others are doing encourages all of us to think harder about ways to use our talents for mission.

*Agnes*

*Columbus, Ohio*

## **Giving thanks for the saints in our midst**

Katie von Bora Luther, wife of Martin Luther, was often present at Martin's famous "table talks." In honor of Katie and in joyous recognition of women in daily ministry, we have begun "Katie's Table."

Send all  
**Postcard  
Ideas**  
to

**Women of the ELCA IdeaNet**

**8765 W. Higgins Rd.**

**Chicago, IL 60631-4189**

**Email: [IdeaNet@elca.org](mailto:IdeaNet@elca.org)**

Each month we select at random the name of a "saint" from among our circle's members. From a basket she chooses a slip of paper containing three questions. A conversation begins, and we all get to know one another better than ever. Like children gathered around Jesus, we gather, over refreshments, around one of our "saints" and learn her story within Jesus' story.

*Rebecca Myers  
St. Andrew Lutheran  
St. Petersburg, Fla.*

## **Invite a speaker from Lutheran World Relief**

See a slide show of Peru. Touch a real rope and washer pump from Niger. Hear about a quilt sighting in India.

LWR friends across the country can share personal perspectives on the work of LWR. Speakers in your area may be available for presentations and workshops for Thankoffering Sunday and other parish events (travel expense reimbursement is requested). To receive a free listing of LWR Speakers' Bureau members, call 800-LWR-LWR-2 or write LWR Resources, 10466 Plano Rd., Dallas, TX 75238.

*Jennifer Uhler  
Lutheran World Relief*

## **Monthly Thankofferings**

We receive Thankofferings monthly (in addition to regular offerings) at our circle meetings. As the Thankoffering envelope is passed around, members are encouraged to share with each other things they may be especially thankful about. The Thankoffering clips from *Women of the ELCA Interchange* [see Winter 1998 issue, pp. 29-35] are often included in our church newsletter. I also send one clip each month to the circles so that a ministry can be highlighted at the circle meetings.

*Millie Woltman  
Trinity Lutheran  
Columbus, Neb.*

## **Women's Rally Day**

We designate a Sunday in the spring for Women of the ELCA Rally Day (patterned after Sunday School Rally Day). We invite the congregation to come and see what the women in the congregation have done or will be doing during the year. We hand each person a Thankoffering envelope along with a note giving our theme, prayer, and thanksgiving focus to encourage others to give. We send out invitations and encourage active participants to invite one woman from the congregation who has not recently been active.

*Phyllis  
Chicago, Ill.*

## **IdeaNet**

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# Tips & Tools: Strengthening Your Net

## Tip 1

**Remember** that God's people are resources for the community of faith that need nurturing, feeding, and an encouraging environment in which to grow.

## Tip 2

**Remind stewards** that we give because God gives and that our gift is our response to God's love. Many see money as the sole object of stewardship or the focus for Thankofferings. But when we focus on offering thanks and responding to God's love, money is seen in its proper perspective as a tool used by the steward who is seeking to live out God's mission.

## Tip 3

**Inspire giving** by telling the stories of God at work in your congregation and community.

## Tip 4

**Keep women informed** of the organization's mission. Lift up the Women of the ELCA purpose statement at each meeting or gathering of women:

*As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit,*

*We commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world.*



**Purpose Statement,  
Women of the ELCA**

## Coming UP in IdeaNet

How does your group help participants grow in faith? How does it affirm members' gifts and support them in their callings? How does it help nurture spirituality, wellness, or wholeness? Share your retreat model, program idea, or resources. Drop a postcard to *IdeaNet* by December 1, 1998.

Have you heard a good devotion lately? What was it about? What are your favorite Scripture texts for devotions? What advice might you give a novice devotionalist? Send *IdeaNet* your ideas by January 4, 1999.

# LUKE'S VISION:

## *The People of God*

*Carol Schersten LaHurd*

### **BIBLE STUDY, SESSION 10**

## **Welcome to the banquet**

### **STUDY TEXTS**

**Luke 14:1-24** A Pharisee's banquet

**Luke 22:7-30** The Lord's supper

### **MEMORY VERSE**

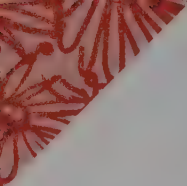
"For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22:27)

### **OVERVIEW**

In Luke's Gospel, why does it seem as though Jesus and his friends are always eating? Banquet parables and the account of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples introduce us to several meanings of meal fellowship in Luke.

### **READING LUKE (OPTIONAL)**

Chapters 22 and 23 of Luke retell the Holy Week events that begin on Thursday evening and end with the placement of Jesus' body in the tomb on Friday afternoon. Included are the Last Supper, the visit to the garden at Gethsemane, Jesus' arrest and trials, the release of Barabbas, the carrying of the cross to Golgotha, and the crucifixion scene.



## OPENING

In this season of thanksgiving, spend a few minutes recalling how your life has been enriched by meal fellowship: with family, friends, and church. Conclude by reading Psalm 104, especially 104:1, 10-24.

## WHO CAN EAT AT MY TABLE?

Garrison Keillor, of the *Prairie Home Companion* radio show, knows that church suppers are second in importance only to Sunday worship. Delicious casseroles and pies are legendary, whether the meals are called “potluck suppers” or “tureen dinners.”

Meal fellowship was a major part of first-century Jewish life as well, and Luke’s Gospel is full of stories of household meals and communal banquets. According to Luke’s report, Jesus ate with both religious leaders and social outcasts and made enemies in the process. For that reason Robert J. Karris remarks, only half in jest, that Jesus was “killed because of the way he ate” (*Luke: Artist and Theologian*, New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

You may recall that Luke 15, with its parables of the lost sheep, coin, and son, was a study text for Session 5. To begin studying meal images in Luke, we will reread some of this chapter.

**1. Read Luke 15**, paying close attention to 15:6-7, 8-10, and 23-32. What do these three celebrations have in common?

Although no food is mentioned in 15:6 and 15:9, from what is known about Middle Eastern hospitality we can safely assume that, as part of their rejoicing, the shepherd and the woman housekeeper served refreshments to their “friends and neighbors.” The father held a public feast to welcome his lost son. Because Jesus refers to rejoicing in heaven in 15:7 and 15:10, these stories illustrate both fellowship in this world and the anticipation of the messianic banquet to come in the next world.



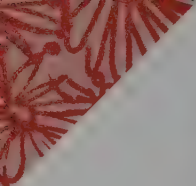
**2. Read Luke 14:1-14**, noticing that Jesus is sharing a Sabbath meal at the house of a Pharisee. How would you explain the deeper meaning of 14:7-11 and 14:12-14? How would you suggest applying Jesus' advice in these two passages to the church today?

Two stories illustrate some aspects of Jesus' concern in Luke 14. The lead article in the May-June 1996 issue of *Seeds for the Parish* reported that organizers of the 1993 gang peace summit in Kansas City, Mo., purposely invited more than 100 people from many different backgrounds to help plan the summit. By following Jesus' advice in Luke 14:12-13, they created a model for successful deliberation that the article termed the "Banquet Table."

A second story comes from a seminary student who volunteered at the homeless shelter of a large urban congregation. The student told about being at the shelter on Maundy Thursday during Holy Week. As the homeless men came into the church basement at the 7:00 P.M.—admitting time—she could hear the sounds of church members observing the day with a meal in the next room. She suddenly became aware that it had occurred to no one to invite the "street people" to share in the communion service or the meal that followed. On that night, the good work done in providing housing became an incomplete hospitality, and a missed opportunity.

Anticipating the feast to come, Jesus' banquet advice in Luke 14 may be intended by Luke to encourage the church of his own time to share not only the gospel, but also meal fellowship with all people. That advice can apply to today's church life as well.

However, clues in Luke 14:14-15 tell us that Jesus is also concerned about the final banquet, feasting with the Messiah and God in the next life. The phrase "the resurrection of the righteous" hints at the judgment to take place at the end of time. In Luke's *eschatology* (view of the end of history and full realization of God's reign), eating "bread in the kingdom of God" can refer to both present life with Jesus and to future eternal life.



In the story of the great banquet (Luke 14:15-20), those invited to attend offer many excuses to explain their refusals. These excuses can symbolize the many reasons why people have failed to respond to Jesus' call to believe the good news and become followers.

**3. Read Luke 14:15-20.** What might be some reasons why people who actually met Jesus rejected him and his message? What are some excuses people today use for not accepting the church's invitation to worship and obey God?

**4. Read Luke 14:21-24.** What do you think of the host's response to learning that the invited guests are not coming?

At the beginning of Luke 14, Jesus is described as the guest at a banquet given by a leader of the Pharisees. By the end of the parable in 14:24, the words "my dinner" imply that Jesus has become the host and may well be referring to the future messianic banquet.

Luke 14:24 shows that rejection of the call to God's kingdom will have consequences. Divine anger includes divine judgment, and those who reject God's Messiah will not join the messianic feast.

The excuses for refusing to attend the feast in Luke 14 take on additional meaning when we remember that this chapter comes during Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem. Jesus seems to know that his death will come soon. It is crucial that people receive his message and invitation without delay,

as “everything is ready now” (14:17). In the previous chapter, Jesus provides an even clearer warning to those who would reject him. In the role of a prophet from God, Jesus announces God’s future judgment and reversal of what conventional wisdom might expect.

## **5. Read Luke 13:22-30.** Which statements surprise you and why?

The banquet parable in Luke 14 has told us that the guest list for God’s kingdom may be somewhat surprising. It may include the poor and exclude many who had originally been invited. Luke 13:26-30 reveals that some people who shared meals with Jesus, but who did not become followers, are likely to be barred from the ultimate feast in God’s kingdom. In both the banquet parable and this teaching, Jesus’ words contribute to the theme of reversal.

The “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Luke 13:28) stands in sharp contrast to the joyful feasting planned for those who accept the invitation in the banquet parable (14:15-24). Luke 13:30 continues the reversal theme we have often seen in Luke’s Gospel. Recall the parables of the rich man and Lazarus in Session 8 (Luke 16), and that of the rich man who built larger barns in Session 9 (Luke 12). In both cases the rich of this world did not share in the heavenly banquet with God, Abraham, and the other prophets.

This exclusion of those who have rejected discipleship should not lead us to believe God’s future kingdom will be restricted to only a few. Look again at Luke 13:29: “Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.” This inclusive community has been prophesied by the old man Simeon who met the infant Jesus in the Jerusalem temple. He saw that Jesus was the “salvation” God had prepared for “all peoples” (Luke 2:30-31). Now in Luke 13 and 14 we see that “all peoples” includes Jews, Gentiles, the lame, and the beggars.





## REMEMBRANCE AND FORETASTE

Luke 22 begins Luke's account of Jesus' final hours before death. It opens with references to the coming Jewish Passover celebration, the plot to execute Jesus, and Judas' deal to betray Jesus to the religious leaders. In 22:7-13 Jesus and his disciples begin preparations for the Passover meal.

**6.** To get a fuller picture, **read Luke 22:1-30**, then reread 22:14-18. Imagine the various reactions the disciples might have had to Jesus' words.

In this story, Jesus tells of his coming suffering and death, a prediction that he has made several times before. Now he makes clear that his death will not be the end. The future feasting will signal his victory over death and the fulfillment of God's kingdom. We need to remember that 2000 years ago at the Last Supper, all of this may have seemed much less clear to Jesus' disciples.

**7.** **Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.** How is this version of the Words of Institution the same as the one in Luke 22:19-20? How is it different?

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, this Passover supper is the time when Jesus introduces the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, or *Eucharist* (from the Greek word for the prayer of thanksgiving Jesus offers).

Immediately after this first Lord's Supper, Jesus tells the disciples that one of them will betray him (Luke 22:21-23). In Mark and Matthew, Jesus gives this warning at the beginning of the meal, and it is not clear if Judas stays for the sharing of bread and wine. Luke's version contains the painful irony that even sharing this sacramental meal with Jesus does not keep

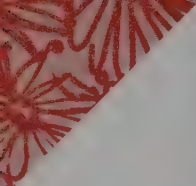
Judas from handing Jesus over to his enemies. Luke 22:22 underscores Jesus' (and Luke's) belief that his death has been "determined" in advance, according to God's will.

**8. Read Luke 22:24-30.** In 22:26-27 what ideas does Jesus add to his banquet advice in 14:7-11?

After the meal and his teaching about service, Jesus gives his disciples the privilege of joining him in the heavenly feast and judgment to come (Luke 22:28-30) because they have stood with him in his trials (22:28). Interestingly, we know later that same evening all Jesus' disciples will desert Jesus at the time of his arrest. Luke does not dwell on their failure, however. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, both at the end of Luke's Gospel and the beginning of Acts, the disciples are described as obeying Jesus' command to pray and wait for the Holy Spirit to enable them to carry on the work of God's kingdom.

Jesus' reference to thrones and kingdom in Luke 22:30 connects this Holy Thursday meal and his impending death with a future eschatological feast. That means this meal in Luke 22 has at least three layers of meaning. It links the supper of Jesus and his followers (as well as Jesus' death) with Passover, the Jewish religious observance of the deliverance from Egypt at the time of Moses. It establishes the ongoing Christian celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion and remembrance of Jesus' last days and death. And it links earthly meal fellowship with the eschatological future, as do Jesus' words in Luke 13:29 and 14:24.

The Passover meal in Luke 22 is one of a number of meals in Luke that symbolize Jesus' continuing presence with his followers, a presence that is not ended by Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. From the earliest days of Christianity this presence has been shared by all the faithful in the sacramental meal. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians probably dates back to the 50s, some 20 years after Jesus' death and at least 20



years before the writing of the Gospels. In 1 Corinthians 11:20, Paul names this practice “the Lord’s supper” and in 11:23-26 he includes words still used in the liturgies of many Christian churches.

Another early description of this sacrament appears in the “First Apology of Justin,” written about 150, just 60 or 70 years after Luke was written. Justin Martyr calls the practice “Eucharist” and explains that it is limited to baptized people. Justin emphasizes that the bread and wine, blessed and distributed at Sunday worship, are Jesus’ body and blood. He also notes that deacons take the consecrated bread and wine to those unable to attend the service. (See “The First Apology of Justin” in *Early Christian Fathers*, trans. Cyril C. Richardson, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972.)

**9.** Reflect on the communion practices in your congregation. How do they compare with the images in Luke, Paul’s writings, and Justin Martyr? Now reflect on your own experience of communion. How have you been nourished at the table?

## LOOKING AHEAD

Session 11 uses passages at the beginning and end of Luke’s Gospel to review such major themes as witnessing, fulfillment of God’s promises and prophecies, and the role of Jesus as Prophet, Messiah, and Son of God. Prepare by learning the memory verse, Luke 24:47-48: “Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” **LWT**

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“Luke’s Vision: The People of God” is prepared by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and edited by Catherine Malotky. Questions or comments about the Bible study should be sent to Barbara Hofmaier, director for educational resources, Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189.

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# A foretaste of the feast: Revelation

Gwen B. Sayler

## A RECIPE FOR READING REVELATION

I can't cook without a recipe. To prepare an edible meal, I have to know the ingredients to use and how to mix them together. Even then I'm not guaranteed success. Once I mistook garlic for ginger, and another time I almost mistook pine cleaner for vegetable oil. It was dark and I couldn't see what I was pouring into the bottom of the popcorn popper! For me, putting a meal together can be a nerve-racking experience.

Reading a book like Revelation is a lot like following a complicated recipe full of largely unknown ingredients mixed together in a highly unusual way. For many of us, putting the ingredients together into a coherent whole will be a nerve-racking experience. Yet, despite the difficulties, Revelation is a fascinating book to read, a feast for us to savor. A brief preview of the recipe we will follow in our 1999 Bible study of Revelation can offer a helpful introduction to the adventure awaiting us.

The title of the recipe for Revelation is "apocalyptic literature." This is writing for hard times. Designed to help communities suffering great hardship because of their faith, apocalyptic writing mixes vivid imagery, complex symbols, and all sorts of evocative phrases to give believers hope and exhort them to action. The primary ingredients in the recipe are visions. These visions portray in gruesome imagery the evil forces responsible for the suffering of the present time. But the visions also say that soon God will act in judgment to vindicate the faithful and hold the oppressors accountable forever. Because the visions are communicated to communities under siege, their message is concealed in a code.

*Apocalyptic literature is writing for hard times.*

***Reading  
apocalyptic  
literature  
is a real  
adventure.***

Central to the apocalyptic code is a picture of the universe that looks a lot like a two-layer cake. The top layer is the heavenly world, inhabited by various sorts of heavenly beings. The bottom layer is the earth, inhabited by humans and threatened by demonic beings. God is pictured as above the universe, ruling in the heavenly world and about to bring final judgment on the earth. This final judgment against the forces of evil will inaugurate a never-ending era of salvation for the faithful.

The various colorful pictures of the two-layer universe are not intended to create a factual description of reality. Their purpose is to give encouragement to members of the suffering community. By "seeing the whole picture" and envisioning what will be in the near future, the community is empowered to keep resisting the forces of evil.

How the visions get mixed together to create a whole is interesting. When we read a book, we tend to expect the plot to move in a straight line from beginning to end, that the story will unfold in chronological order. This is not the case with apocalyptic literature. Instead, visions are piled upon each other in what may seem to be a random order; repetitions abound and previews interrupt what flow there is. Sometimes a new vision is introduced before the previous vision is finished. Reading apocalyptic literature is a real adventure.

**Revelation is an apocalyptic writing addressed to Christian communities in Asia Minor** (modern-day Turkey) near the end of the first century. Situated in areas controlled by the Roman Empire, these communities were confronted with the demand to compromise their allegiance to God by giving allegiance to Roman religion and ways. Revelation is a call to the communities to say "no" to Roman pressure, to resist offensive and oppressive Roman demands no matter what the cost. Secure in the promise that God is in control of the universe and will act soon to prosecute the oppressor and vindicate the persecuted, Christians are exhorted to persevere in the present time. Powered and protected by God's promise, they have good news to proclaim by the way they continue resisting the forces of evil in this world.

**The invitation to study Revelation is an invitation to be surprised.** Most of us will be fascinated, overwhelmed, and perhaps sometimes repelled by the visions we encounter. Some of the language and images may be offensive. Together, we will discover surprising echoes of Old Testament stories in the visions, particularly the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Our study also will introduce us to stories about Near Eastern gods and goddesses, and about kingly rule in the Roman world. These stories, well-known to the original readers of Revelation, are recast in creative ways in Revelation to emphasize God's saving power.

The message of Revelation has direct implications for how we live our everyday lives; it is a call to us to take action to resist the forces of destruction in our world today. Some of us may have heard Revelation presented as a prophecy revealing how contemporary historical events are leading to the final judgment. This approach is not new. It's been used throughout the centuries, with the identification of "contemporary historical events" changing to fit the needs of different generations. However, by reading Revelation as apocalyptic literature, we will follow a different recipe. The assumption underlying our Bible study is that the inspired scriptures were given to us to transform us for mission in our world.

Revelation's recipe for resistance against the forces of evil retains its transforming power for us today. In our study, this recipe will challenge us to reflect on our response to world hunger, the kind of suffering we're called to bear, global economic injustice, and the harmful effects of using certain biblical images to stereotype women today.

One more surprise awaits us: the sheer enjoyment of the wonderful, powerful hymns of praise and salvation interspersed in the visions of Revelation. Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus*, our liturgical song "This Is the Feast," and some of the most comforting poetry ever written have their roots in Revelation. We will get to savor the feast these passages set before us.

Ready to get cooking? Our study of Revelation truly will be an adventure. Welcome! **LWT**

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# The card table

Daniel L. Bohlman



Thanksgiving Day—the dining room has been swallowed up by a table of crystal and china; candle flames dance from the candelabra. The food throws off its wonderful smells. Before anyone can sit down, my father takes a picture of the table; he believes it is worthy of the cover of *Better Homes and Gardens*. The scene is that beautiful.

Sixteen chairs sit around this smorgasbord of turkey, stuffing, mashed and riced potatoes, corn, beans, cranberries, salad, and buns. When we have feasted on all that, there is pumpkin pie and chocolate meringue in the kitchen waiting for their turn.

We gather, not sit, around the table for the blessing, because there are more bodies than chairs. When we have thanked God for the rich bounty bestowed upon our family, we find our wine glasses and give a toast. At age 15, I lift up my milk glass with embarrassment and clink it against their goblets.

The adults in my family sit and begin the mandatory talk about how good the food looks as they fill their plates. Meanwhile, I turn around and head for the dilapidated card table that sits beneath the second entrance to the dining room.

I'm sitting with five other people—young people—from 5-year-old Silvester whose nose won't stop running to 12-year-old Suzanne who is "finding herself" by wearing black lipstick and fluorescent clothes.

I lean over to grab the potatoes and nearly knock the flimsy table over, but none of them says a word; they know how I feel.

I eat in silence and watch the adults enjoying rich conversation and wonder when I'm going to be allowed there. It's so humiliating. I'm not a child anymore. I am an adult. I have an opinion on political issues and the price of gas. I have something to say. More than anything else, though, I want to be counted as an equal. I want to be found worthy of being at "the table."

The years have passed, and I just read about a man who, after 10 years of separation from his family because of his homosexuality, was invited home for Thanksgiving. When the meal was served, he was seated apart from the family, at a separate table that was set with paper plates and plastic utensils.

As adults, we continue to relegate and be relegated to the dilapidated card tables in the corner. But now, it isn't determined by age but by worthiness. And we all know that being relegated to the card table as adults is a lot more painful than when it happened to us at age 10 or 15. It hurts all the way down to the soul.

As a pastor, I lead our church in the celebration of Holy Communion. As the families come forward, I give the bread and wine to some and give a blessing to others—the younger children in our church. I smile. My blessing is genuine; it is from my heart, and I hope all the kids understand the blessing is straight from God. But I can't help feeling that I am relegating some to the church's card table.

Children, adolescents, middle-aged adults, and elderly adults—we all watch carefully at meal gatherings because that card table is

always there. We so hope and pray we won't end up there, but sometimes we do. And when we do, it hurts so much.

So what do we do with these mealtimes that can be either joyous or grievous? Look to Jesus who allowed even disciples that would later betray and deny him to eat at his table—and share in the most sacred meal the world has ever known. Add a leaf to the table. Pass the food around freely. If it's crowded, celebrate the fact that we're rubbing elbows with brothers and sisters.

Let's learn to laugh at our frailties and the frailties of the ones beside us. If we spill, the linen can always be washed. We get that from Jesus, too, who told us, "Just love."

Maybe it's time to make our tables—and our hearts—bigger. **LWT**



*Daniel L. Bohlman has been pastor of Apple Grove and Yellowstone Lutheran churches in Argyle, Wis., for six years. He and his wife, Ann, have two boys, Lee (age 9) and Andy (age 6).*

# The advent of relationship



The Moravian Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, who together share close kinship in their roots and practices, are considering an agreement of full communion with each other (see “Learn more . . .” on page 42). This two-part article, in the November and December 1998 issues, serves two purposes. First and foremost are Scripture readings and prayers for each day in Advent (November 29 through December 24, 1998). Second, between the Scripture and prayers, each day’s reflection offers a nugget of information about the Moravian Church. The devotion for December 13 follows the *1998 Moravian Daily Texts*, an important devotional book for Moravians. God’s blessings as you enrich your Advent journey and your understanding of the Moravian Church.—ED

## SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 1998

“How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1)

The Moravian Church, with more than 500 years of history, has long focused on faithful living and Christian unity. Rather than concentrating on divisive doctrines, we preach the basics of the faith that all Christians share.

*Lord Jesus, thank you for unity among believers. May we all be known by the love we have for one another. Amen.*

## MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 1998

“What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)



Moravians strive to live out the faith through service to those in need, concentrating on the poor, the powerless, and the unchurched. Opportunities for ministry become clear as we seek to have a servant's heart.

*Merciful Lord, help us to live out our faith through service to others. Forgive us for those times we have failed to act justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly. May we live so that the world will know that you have come. Amen.*

## **TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 1998**

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." (Colossians 3:16)

The Moravian Church, organized in 1457 by followers of the martyr John Hus, is formally known as the "Unity of Brethren." The denomination was the first to print common language hymnals. The hymn "Come, Let Us All with Gladness Raise" was written for the ordination of the first Moravian ministers in 1467.

*"Come, let us all with gladness raise a joyous song of thanks and praise to God who rules the heavenly host God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost." Amen. (Moravian Book of Worship 519)*

## **WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1998**

"There is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

Early on, the Moravian Church emphasized the education of

women, founding educational institutions for women in Bethlehem, Pa., and Salem, N.C., prior to the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Moravians first ordained women in the United States in 1975, and in August 1998 the denomination elected its first female bishop.

*Lord, let us not be conformed to this world, but transform us. Renew our minds as we study your word. Amen.*

## **THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 1998**

"The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one." (John 17:22)

The Moravian Church in America has a long ecumenical tradition. As such, we are a founding member of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

*Holy God, send us forth as your ambassadors of reconciliation in a broken and troubled world. Bring peace to the conflicts of nations, races, and tribes. Amen.*

## **FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1998**

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:19)

The Yup'ik Moravians of Alaska have established evangelistic outreach among their ethnic kinfolk in the Chukotka peninsula of Siberia. Annually they meet together for discipleship workshops and meetings to determine how best to share resources.

*Ever-present God, you continually rush out to meet and embrace us while we are yet far off. Thank you for the depth of your forgiving love. Amen.*

### **SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1998**

"Love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

Moravians cherish Christian love within the church. Realizing that God has called us from many and varied backgrounds, we recognize the possibility of disagreements. Often these differences can enrich the church, but sometimes they divide us.

*Lord Jesus, thank you for your example of love. Help us to demonstrate your love within our own congregations. May your love in our lives be a witness to our community. Amen.*

### **SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1998**

"Praise the LORD! Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!" (Psalm 150:1, 3, 6)

Throughout the church year, music plays a vital role in Moravian congregations. Even during legislative meetings (known as synods), delegates gather for a blessing in song before meals.

*"Be present at our table, Lord; be here and everywhere adored; from your all-bounteous hand our food, may we receive with gratitude. Amen." (MBW 816)*

### **MONDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1998**

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers." (Matthew 9:37-38)

The Moravians of Herrnhut, Germany, led the way in Protestant world mission, sending two men to the Danish West Indies in 1732. Today, Moravians in developing countries account for about 75 percent of all Moravians worldwide.

*Thank you, Lord, for calling laborers into the harvest. Empower us to share your words with our friends and neighbors. Amen.*

### **TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1998**

"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2)

Moravians believe that the essential in Christian life is our relationship to God through Christ. Beyond that, we hold to the principle, "in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, love."

*Eternal God, strengthen our faith in your saving work through Christ, and your good will for all that you have made. Amen.*

### **WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 1998**

"I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, so I shall be saved from my enemies." (Psalm 18:3)

The Moravian Church in Nicaragua is set to celebrate its

150th anniversary in 1999. Nicaraguan Moravians experience challenge and God's grace in their efforts to rebuild lives and communities torn by the conflicts of the 1980s.

*Thank you, Lord, for your faithfulness to Christians in Nicaragua. Help us to remember that you are our fortress and deliverer; a rock in whom we can take refuge. Amen.*

#### **THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1998**

"Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away." (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

During Advent, many Moravian congregations and families build a *putz* (an extended nativity scene) as a way of telling the Christmas story to both young and old.

*Eternal God, we gather as your family to celebrate our diverse homes, and to seek your blessings on them. Amen.*

#### **FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1998**

"Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." (Matthew 4:19)

Missionaries from Nicaragua and North America established the Moravian Church in Honduras in 1930. Largely Miskitu in ethnicity, Honduran Moravians are an evangelistic witness among other ethnic groups.

*Praise God for the gifts of the Holy Spirit! May these gifts equip*

*believers to do ministry, build up the body of Christ, and bring unity of the faith. Amen.*

#### **SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1998**

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105)

Since 1731, the Moravian Church has published an annual devotional book, *Moravian Daily Texts*. Old and New Testament texts are selected for each day. Hymns and prayers are often provided as well. In 1998 the *Moravian Daily Texts* was published in 41 languages. Tomorrow's text presents a page from this small devotional.

*Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of studying your word. May we look to you for light in this world of darkness. Amen.*

#### **SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1998** (a page from the *Daily Texts*)

51st Week—

Third Sunday of Advent

#### **Watchword for the Week**

"Prepare the way of the LORD.... See, the LORD God comes with might." (Isaiah 40:3,10)

**SUNDAY 13**—Isaiah 35:1-10;  
James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11  
Psalm 146:5-10

**Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise.**  
(Psalm 119:41)

The word of God a promise told:  
a king shall come, let all behold.  
The world awaits his presence new,



a Child, a Son, a Savior true.  
(MBW 299)

**She came and knelt before him,  
saying, "Lord, help me." ...  
Jesus answered her, "Woman,  
great is your faith! Let it be  
done for you as you wish." And  
her daughter was healed  
instantly. (Matthew 15:25-28)**

Faith is a living power from heav'n  
that grasps the promise God has  
giv'n, a trust that can't be over-  
thrown, fixed heartily on Christ  
alone. (MBW 700)

*God, Giver of all good, we thank  
you for keeping your promise and  
sending us a Savior. We thank  
you for the gift of faith that  
enables us to trust in the Savior  
whom you have sent. We thank  
you for all the blessings that faith  
opens the way for us to receive.  
And we thank you for all the  
blessings that our prayers in faith  
open the way for others to receive.  
Amen. LWT*

*The devotions were prepared by  
the Interprovincial Board of Com-  
munication, Moravian Church in  
America, Roxann L. Miller, director.  
Part 2 of "The advent of relationship"  
(devotions for December 14-24), will  
be carried in the December 1998  
issue of LWT.*

## **LEARN MORE ABOUT THE MORAVIANS**

Since 1992, Lutherans and the Moravians in America have held official dialogues. In 1998, the Northern and Southern Provinces of the Moravian Church voted to enter into full communion with the ELCA. The ELCA will consider the proposal at its 1999 Churchwide Assembly.

What difference would full communion between the ELCA and the Moravian Church in America mean for congregations? Resources are available for congregations and small groups to answer this question and discuss the issues.

***Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion: Report of the Lutheran-Moravian Dialogue*** (code LT6-0000-7480-8) and ***Questions and Answers: A Study Guide for Congregations*** (code LT6-000-9892-8) are available from Augsburg Fortress at 800-328-4648.

There is a new resource called ***Living into Full Communion: A Congregational Discussion Guide for Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion***, offered to help congregations explore their common heritage and consider joint mission projects for the future. Call the ELCA Department for Ecumenical Affairs at 800-638-3522, ext. 2610 for a copy of this guide.

*Darlis J. Swan  
ELCA Department of  
Ecumenical Affairs*

## GRANTS

# Transformed by hope



Delores Keppel and I met four years ago at a Lutheran-sponsored seminar on women and children in poverty. At one of our small-group discussions she talked about her own struggles with poverty. Pregnant and jobless, she had recently lost her welfare benefits and had moved out of a rat-infested apartment into a homeless shelter. Although her pastor and church community at Transfiguration Lutheran Church in the Bronx were always supportive and caring, she nevertheless felt "worn down" by the burdens of daily living, trying to survive with other homeless families who were also "helpless, hopeless, and lost."

The seminar, however, reaffirmed Delores' belief that she was never alone. Not only were God and her church right there with her, but she also learned that there were others helping as well: people advocating for justice through their legislators; women in churches around the nation working against poverty in their own communities; and Women of the ELCA giving financial support to church-sponsored ministries such as those at Transfiguration.

Recently I saw Delores again at another church-sponsored seminar. This time she was a featured speaker, telling her audience, "Today I stand before you transformed, living proof that it can be done." In the intervening four years Delores had learned through her church and community how to be "a community organizer, advocate, counselor, good listener, and Bible study and Sunday school teacher." She is now a part-time professional community organizer, a teacher's assistant in the public schools, and the president of her church.

Delores also volunteers her time at the Transfiguration Family Center, supported in part by a grant from Women of the ELCA. Through the center, she now helps other women and children become transformed, experience God's love, and learn what they can do to



*Delores Keppel—  
"transformed!"*

help themselves. First, though, she addresses the fact that most members of her women's group "don't know how to love themselves." Because of this, she conducts workshops on self-esteem, takes the members to have their nails done or to have lunch at a nice restaurant on Mother's Day, or "just take walks to smell the flowers and feel God's presence." Her after-school program offers a safe place where children can learn and grow through such activities as workshops on non-violent conflict resolution.

Delores' deep faith in God is what sustains her. "Wherever I go, I know that I am a child of God, and so I love my neighbor. As God's people, we are here to spread our wings like eagles so that none of God's children will fall to the ground."

Women of the ELCA grants continue to fund projects supporting women and children such as those at Transfiguration. In 1998 a total of \$125,600 was awarded to 41 programs, many of which help women and children break the cycles of poverty and injustice. Twenty-two of the programs are either sponsored and run directly by Lutheran congregations, women's units, or social-service organizations, or have significant support from coalitions of Lutheran congregations.

### THREE GRANT FUNDS

Organizations wishing to apply for Women of the ELCA grants may do so through these three funding sources:

**1. The Fund for the Development of Human Resources** offers help to

projects that develop human resources, especially women, in the United States and globally. Human resources can be strengthened by meeting spiritual, social, emotional, educational, or physical needs.

**2. The New Ministries Fund** is used to develop new or innovative programs. Grants are given as seed money, with the hope that the project can become self-sustaining.

**3. The Women and Children in Crisis Designated Gift Fund #528** is funded solely by contributions from participants in Women of the ELCA. Through 1999, grants from this fund will be awarded to programs in these categories: Advocating for Justice; Supporting Women around the World; Enabling Communities to Solve Their Problems; Supporting Children at Risk; and Income-Generating Projects for Women.

*Doris Strieter  
Women of the ELCA  
program director*

### APPLICATION DEADLINES

Organizations and agencies should request 1999 grant criteria and application forms by writing to Women of the ELCA Grants Program, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189. Completed grant applications must be **post-marked on or before February 15, 1999**. Grant recipients will be chosen and notified in May and will receive funding in June.



## NEW VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS MINISTRIES WITH CHILDREN

"Journey to Wholeness," a video with an accompanying study guide, features three programs supported by Women of the ELCA grants that help children by advocating for justice, by providing loving families, and by offering them a spiritual community. An excellent resource for circle or unit programs and discussion groups, this 24-minute video is available on free loan from synodical women's organizations, ELCA resource centers, and the Women of the ELCA churchwide office (800-638-3522, ext. 2747).

—DS

## SCHOLARSHIPS

# An investment in women

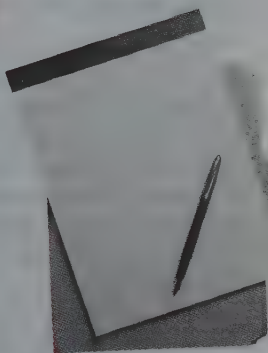
How wonderful to open thank-you notes like the one that began, "Bless your heart for being so nice" and continued, "... thank you for the scholarship I received again this year. You are helping to make it possible for me to finish my education so that I can minister to the aging. It [the scholarship] certainly is an answer to a prayer."

Another card said, "I will try to represent Women of the ELCA well. Thank you so much for helping me pursue my college career!"

And yet another reads, "I would like to express my deepest gratitude for the most generous scholarship awarded to me. It will be of great help and assistance with my studies."

A contribution to one of the Women of the ELCA Scholarship Funds is a gift that keeps on giving. It goes on and on—making a difference.

Scholarship criteria vary greatly. Some are very



specific, such as, "to assist women studying for service in *health* professions connected with ELCA projects abroad," and "assist women studying for *ELCA services abroad*." Sometimes it is difficult to find applicants who meet the criteria for these funds. Other funds have general criteria, as in "to assist *Lutheran laywomen* in undergraduate, graduate, professional, or vocational courses of study ... no additional restrictions." These funds could use additional dollars because of all the requests that go unfilled.

One Women of the ELCA scholarship fund provides assistance to women who are second-career students at ELCA seminaries and preparing for the ordained ministry. This year, 11 women applied; one recipient received the \$1000 available. She graduates in December 1999 and becomes the third woman to receive Women of the ELCA assistance to ordination and service in an ELCA congregation. What a blessing that in 1995 Women of the ELCA set up the Chilstrom Scholarship to provide this type of help to Lutheran women!

We were able to help four women situated in positions of leadership in ELCA colleges and seminaries attend summer leadership institutes. This is a valuable investment in these women, in the institutions, and in the hundreds of students they reach.

In all, the Women of the ELCA Scholarship Committee had the joy of recommending 20 women (out of 69 applicants) to be recipients of a

total of \$35,700 in scholarship assistance. The educational programs vary greatly, from "leadership, with concentration on administration and management, graduate level" to theater education, biochemistry, and English as a Second Language. Ages varied from 22 to 57. Recipients came from eight of the nine ELCA regions.

Want to make a valuable investment? Consider applying for a scholarship, encouraging someone else to do so, or giving a gift to one of the existing scholarships.

Or: Talk with Women of the ELCA about creating a scholarship that is close to your heart!

*Faith Fretheim*  
*Women of the ELCA*  
*program director*

## APPLICATION DEADLINES

For an informational brochure on Women of the ELCA Scholarships, call 800-638-3522, ext 2736. Applications forms for 1999-2000 scholarships will be sent, on request, *after* October 1, 1998. Return completed applications to Women of the ELCA Scholarships, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189. Applications must be **post-marked no later than March 9, 1999**. All applicants will receive written notice of the committee's decisions by May 28, 1999.

THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCES

# Feasting at Katie's Table

"I was asked by my mother [to go to the theological conference], and I could hear the yearning for a mother-daughter weekend."

That's how Valerie Stickles, age 30, of Columbus, Ga., says she found herself and her mother Carla Stickles—along with 50 other women—doing theology at a Women of the ELCA Theological Conference last April, and loving every minute of it!

The scene was Camp Kinard in Florence, S.C., where from Friday night through Sunday noon participants from Region 9 drank deeply from the Lutheran theological well and came away refreshed and energized.

The participants practiced "doing theology" with three Lutheran presenters—Prof. Norma Cook Everist of Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa; the Rev. Timothea Lewis, Florence, S.C.; and Beverly Wallace, a chaplain from Emory University, Atlanta. Each presenter had her specialty. With Prof. Everist, the group worked through segments on "Feasting on Theology," "Lutheran Theology," "Discerning—Using Theology," and "Doing Theological Thinking."

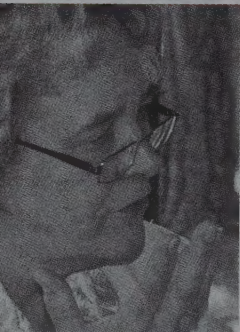
Pastor Lewis helped the women look at ways of interpreting Scripture, especially related to modern issues. Beverly Wallace, a recent graduate of the Lutheran Theological Center in Atlanta, talked on personal and corporate spiritual life and worship.

"It really made theology friendly," remarked Ada Bermudez of San Juan, Puerto Rico. "My expectations were geared to a more formal approach. However, I'm glad the method chosen was practicing or doing theology. It helped me accept a new way to study theology."



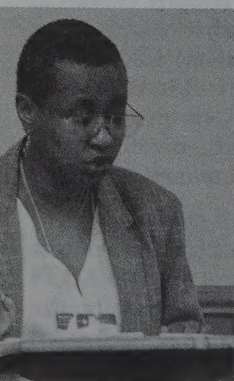
*Four sets of daughters (left) and their respective mothers (right) who attended the conference*





*"I never  
thought I was a  
theologian—  
until now!"*

*Judith Shotts,  
Wendell, N.C.*



*Beverly Wallace  
makes a point at  
the theological  
conference.*

This Region 9 gathering is one of seven such theological conferences—titled "Feasting at Katie's Table"—that have taken place since September 1997 under the auspices of churchwide Women of the ELCA, with local planners involved early in the development of each event. Marie Mauney of Old Fort, N.C., was the retreat coordinator for the South Carolina event. To lay a common foundation for the retreats, Prof. Everist was the key presenter at each conference, with two local woman theologians tapped for service in each respective area.

The Region 9 conference had a special zest about it, sparked by some unusual configurations of participants that made for exciting interaction. Among the participants were four sets of mothers and daughters; a pair of sisters; a pair of sisters-in-law; three current synodical women's organization presidents; and three attendees from the Caribbean Synodical Women's Organization.

As in all the theological conferences, Sunday morning worship was special. On Saturday participants signed up to help create a part of the Sunday-morning liturgy—one of the three readings, the Psalm, or the choir. The charge to the groups: "Be creative as you allow the Spirit to help you share the Word." And the Spirit was surely in evidence—in a choral reading of the Psalm; a dramatic reenactment of Paul's conversion on the Damascus road and of Jesus' telling his disciples to "feed my sheep"; and a quasi-liturgical dance/reading of Revelation 5:11-14, complete with bed sheets as impromptu costumes for the angels and living creatures of the Revelation text.

Responses to these prototype theological conferences have been so positive that at the Fourth Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA (next July in St. Louis) a new video on these events will premiere as part of the "roll-out" of programs for the next triennium. Watch for future information.

Who knew doing theology could be so much fun! **LWT**

*Nancy J. Stelling  
Editor, LWT*

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*All Saints' Day*  
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